

Ballad: At A Pantomime. By A Bilious

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In the dim confines of a damp dressing room within the grand Theatre Royal, World, an actor, his face shrouded by a flowing wig and his jaws adorned with a lengthy beard, prepares for his seasonal performance in the cherished pantomime, "HARLEQUIN LIFE AND DEATH." Draped in a gown designed to exaggerate his frail form, he stands ready, urging for the limelight to shine upon the stage, transforming him into the embodiment of jolly Old Christmas.

As the curtain rises, the darkness of the stage symbolizes the waning moments of the year, with Time personified by a quack heralding the end and the Old Year on the brink of expiration. With a sudden flourish, Time unveils the figure of Old Christmas, igniting delight in the hearts of watching children, their laughter and applause filling the air, charmed by the façade of joy and festivity.

Yet, amidst the revelry, a sadder truth lingers for those of advanced years who watch from the shadows, their faces etched with the knowledge of many a bygone season. These seasoned souls see beyond the spectacle, recognizing the recurring ghoul of Christmas not as a bearer of joy, but as a herald of hardship. They recount the cold embrace of winters past, marked by scarcity, the sting of poverty, the ache of illnesses, and the weight of insurmountable bills - the reality veiled beneath the veneer of holiday cheer.

Through this ballad, the contrast between the naiveté of youth, with their unblemished rapture for the holiday season, and the jaded eyes of the elder, schooled in the harsh lessons of life, is starkly drawn. It paints a vivid tableau of a festive season where the joy is as much a performance as the actors on the stage, a time that, for some, brings laughter and gifts, and for others, a reminder of the enduring struggles that lie beyond

the pantomime's end.



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